

LATIN AMERICA THROUGH FILM

Educator's Guide

WHICH WAY HOME

Directed by Rebecca Cammisa

United States, 2009

Length: 83 minutes

In Spanish and English with subtitles



FILM SUMMARY

“Of the thousands of Latin American migrants traveling through Mexico with the hope of reaching the United States, approximately five percent are unaccompanied children. Director Rebecca Cammisa follows several such children on their grueling but ever-hopeful journey north. Kevin and Fito have fled their small town in search of greater opportunities in America. José set out for the States but was quickly apprehended and now languishes in the bureaucratic process of deportation back to Honduras. These are just a few of the true stories of young children undertaking the brutal odyssey from Latin America to the United States, never letting their dire circumstances overtake their youthful exuberance. In this bold, revelatory documentary, Cammisa presents a harrowing tale of children in danger, riding on tops of freight trains and subject to conditions beyond the capacity of their tender years to navigate. But this is also a story of indefatigable youth, of children of very young age pursuing the only outlet for

opportunity they perceive, and of the many allies and adversaries they encounter along the way.” – Tribeca Film Festival.

“The film follows several unaccompanied child migrants as they journey through Mexico en route to the U.S. on a freight train they call "The Beast." Director Rebecca Cammisa ("Sister Helen") tracks the stories of children like Olga and Freddy, nine-year old Hondurans who are desperately trying to reach their families in Minnesota, and Jose, a ten-year-old El Salvadoran who has been abandoned by smugglers and ends up alone in a Mexican detention center, and focuses on Kevin, a canny, streetwise 14-year-old Honduran, fleeing an abusive stepfather, and whose mother hopes that he will reach New York City and send money back to his family. These are stories of hope and courage, disappointment and sorrow. They are the ones you never hear about - the invisible ones.” –Bullfrogfilms.com

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

- The 2010 EMMY Award for Outstanding Informational Programming
- The Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award Grand Prize
- The 2010 Imagen Award for Best Documentary on Television
- The American Heritage Award for Distinguished Public Service, the American Immigration Council
- The La Mancha Humanitarian Award, The Casa Cornelia Law Center
- The Humanitarian Activist Award, Alliance of Women Film Journalists
- Jury Honorable Mention for Documentary Feature, Cine Las Americas FF
- Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature, Cine Las Americas FF
- Eye Audience Award, Seoul International Youth Film Festival, South Korea
- Special Jury Prize for Human Rights, Traverse City Film Festival, Michigan
- The UNICEF Award, The 2009 Havana International Film Festival
- The 2010 Youth Vision Award, United Nations Association Film Festival

- The 2011 Dirk Vanderypen Journalism Award
- Le Grand Prix du Festival
Festival des Libertés, Belgium

NOMINATIONS

- ACADEMY AWARD® Nominee 2010 Best Documentary Feature
- The Independent Spirit Award for Best Documentary Film
- EMMY Award Nominee 2010 for Outstanding Individual Achievement — Cinematography
- EMMY Award Nominee 2010 for Outstanding Individual Achievement — Editing
- EMMY Award Nominee 2010 for Outstanding Individual Achievement — Research

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

In 2003, Rebecca Cammisa founded Documentress Films, teamed up with Mr. Mudd Productions, and began developing the 2010 OSCAR-nominated documentary, "Which Way Home," for which she received a 2006 Fulbright Fellowship for Filmmaking.

"Which Way Home" aired on HBO and was nominated for a 2010 Independent Spirit Award for Best Documentary, and received four Emmy nominations. The film won the 2010 News & Documentary Emmy Award for Outstanding

Informational Programming and also received a 2010 Imagen Award for Best Documentary on Television. (Taken from <http://whichwayhome.net/about-the-filmmakers.html>)



Check out the links below for interviews with Rebecca Cammisa discussing her film *Which Way Home*

- [The documentarian discusses how 2005-2006 Fulbright to Mexico helped her in producing and directing the critically-acclaimed "Which Way Home" and how other filmmakers can benefit from the Fulbright experience](#)
- [Director Rebecca Cammisa discusses her feature-length documentary "Which Way Home," which follows three unaccompanied children as they leave their homes in Latin America and travel through Mexico to the U.S. border in order to reunite with their parents who've made the trip before them.](#)
- [Question and Answer with Rebecca Cammisa on the making of Which Way Home.](#)

MEET THE CAST (taken from the official website for the movie at <http://whichwayhome.net/meet-the-children.html>)

Kevin, a canny, 14-year-old Honduran, is traveling through Mexico to get to the United States. His reason: to find a job and send money back to his mother, Lupe. Kevin hopes to buy her a house so that she can leave an abusive relationship. Lupe hopes he will find work, or some U.S. citizen will adopt him. Kevin wants to go to Manhattan. But the trip is a revelation to Kevin – he was prepared for the harshness of the journey, but the violence that he experiences and witnesses takes its toll. Unexpectedly, he reexamines the high cost migrants pay for their common dream of a better life in the United States.

Fito, 13-year-old Honduran whose mother abandoned him when he was very young, lives with his impoverished grandmother, who has a job making cigars. He is traveling to the U.S. to look for work and

hopes to be adopted.

Yurico, a 17-year-old Mexican who ran away from his mother, has lived on the streets of Tapachula, Chiapas since age seven. Yurico proclaims that his life has been spent begging and sleeping on streets, thieving and abusing drugs; sometimes he makes money by washing buses at the city depot. Yurico wants a life free of drugs and violence, and is traveling to the U.S. to find a loving family.

Jairo, a 14-year-old Mexican whose father never accepted him. He has lived on the streets of Chiapas since his mother was killed a year ago. Schooling is very important to him, but he cannot currently afford to continue his education. Jairo has decided to go to Laredo, Texas to find employment, and then return to Mexico with money to hire a tutor.

Jose, a nine-year-old Salvadoran, lives with his aunt, and has not seen his mother Rosa since she left to work in the U.S. three years ago. Hoping to live with her, he traveled through Mexico on a bus with a smuggler. When Mexican immigration officials boarded the bus, the smuggler abandoned Jose, who was then taken to a detention center.

Olga and Freddy, nine-year-old Hondurans being taken to the U.S. by smugglers, travel on Mexican freight trains. Olga is trying to get to her mother and sisters in Minnesota, while Freddy wants to reunite with his father. Both have witnessed many accidents while riding the trains, and hope that God will bless their journey.

Juan Carlos, a 13-year-old Guatemalan, left a letter for his mother Esmeralda, stating that he was going to the U.S. to help her and his siblings. Juan Carlos' father abandoned the family years ago, so he feels it is his responsibility to provide for them. He also wants to find his father in New York, and confront him about why he's forgotten them.

WHICH WAY HOME also features the families of two young migrants who did not survive their journey. The bodies of 13-year-old **Eloy** and his 16-year-old cousin **Rosario** were found separately in the desert. Their deaths, along with the other stories of those featured in the film, underscore the extremely dangerous journey undertaken by these often-invisible children, who are making adult decisions to change their lives.

LESSON PLANS
& ACTIVITIES

The following activities can be used to accompany the viewing of the film *Which Way Home*. The activities are divided into the following categories: Geography, Literacy, and Extension Projects. The majority of the activities below support literacy standards through reading and/or writing. Each category of activities is linked to the appropriate Common Core Standards

Geography

Common Core Standards Addressed:

K-12

Reading

Key Ideas and Details:

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational text independently and proficiently.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate the content presented in diverse media formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes:

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

This activity can be done as an activity before viewing the film and continued throughout the viewing of the film

The children featured in the film come from multiple countries—Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Find each country on a map. Briefly discuss the location of the country. If possible mark the map with that child immigrant's name. Then using string, yarn, etc. mark the path that the child took to try and make it to the United States, updating this throughout the viewing of the movie.

If time allows, divide the class into groups, assigning each group a country. Have the students research the country and create a report

Writing

or poster presentation. If appropriate for the age group, have students research the state of the country and the reasons why children would be attempting to immigrate to the United States.

Common Core Standards Addressed:

K-12

Reading

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Integrate and evaluate the content presented in diverse media formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational text independently and proficiently.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes:

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing:

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Dialogue Journal

This activity was adapted from an activity found in *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* by Linda Christensen (Rethinking Schools Publications, 2000, p. 48-49). See the end of this guide for the accompanying activity sheets to use in your classroom.

Give each student a copy of Activity Sheet #1. As a class, read over the various themes listed on the sheet, discussing what they mean, and possible examples. Have each student create a table out of paper with two columns labeled “Observations/Quotes” and “Reactions and Reflections” (See Activity Sheet #2 for an example). View the film over a few days. Have students use the table they created to keep a dialogue journal throughout the viewing of the film. Students can keep track of their thoughts as they watch the film, then give them time at the end of each class period to expand on their “Reactions and Reflections” section.

If time allows, expand the activity by having students write a more in-depth review of the movie or reflection on the themes based upon

Extension Projects:
Immigration

the things they noted in their dialogue journal. Students should include why or why not they would recommend the movie, its usefulness in the classroom, and what their reaction to the film was.

Character Study

Pick your favorite character. Imagine that you are living his or her life. How would you feel? What would you do if you were in his or her position? Would you still try to come to the United States? How would your life be different from what it is today? Does this character change over the course of the film? If so, how? Write an essay that answers all of these questions.

The View from Abroad

Many of the children in the film discuss what they think the United States is going to be like. Do you think their impressions are correct? Do you think it is worth risking everything to come to the United States? If you could have a conversation with any of the children from the movie what would you tell them? What do you think they should know?

Common Core Standards Addressed:

K-12

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- Integrate and evaluate the content presented in diverse media formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes:

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Production and Distribution of Writing:

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

This activity is more suited for an entire unit on immigration that would allow for the viewing of more than just one movie. Begin by showing one film on the topic of immigration (some possibilities in addition to *Which Way Home* are listed below). Once students have viewed this film, discuss the themes, developments, or ideas presented in the film. Based on this discussion create some sort of visual diagram or table that can be used to take notes on the remaining films to be viewed—perhaps a table grouped by characters, countries, themes, plot, etc.

As each film is viewed, fill out the table either as a class or individually.

Once students have viewed the chosen films, ask them to sort through what they've seen—Are there common themes in these films? If so, what are they? What do the films have in common? Are any of the characters similar? Is the viewer's response different for each film? Do the films leave the viewer feeling the same way? What information are we given on immigration through these films? What do we learn? Did your thinking on immigration change at all? What did you learn? Which film was the most memorable for you - and why? What were the intentions or purposes of the individual directors in creating these films?

With the information gathered from the above questions and conversations, have students create some sort of culminating paper or project. There are a number of possibilities:

- Students create a Venn Diagram comparing two or more of the movies, then write a compare and contrast essay using the Venn Diagram as the basis for their essay.
- Students create a graphic organizer on “Learning about Immigration through Film.” With this information, students then write an essay that discusses the themes that each film explores and how these themes contribute to learning about Immigration through Film.
- Students write a reflective essay that describes their personal learning journey as they were exposed to these various films about immigration. They should include their initial thoughts on immigration before the unit and how their opinions or thinking changed by the end of the unit. They should discuss any “Aha” moments they had and why these were significant. They could include a discussion of the movie they found the most meaningful and why.

Examples of films about immigration:

Balseros (Cuban immigration)

Mojados (Mexican immigration)

Sin Nombre

RESOURCES

Teacher's Guide on *Which Way Home*

<http://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/content.php?pid=151180&sid=1383875>

Research Guide for the movie *Which Way Home* offered through the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Lesson Plans to accompany novel, *Esperanza Rising*, about a girl who leaves Mexico for the United States

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/esperanza-rising-learning-not-be-afraid-start-over#sect-thelesson>

“Approaches to Understanding Current US/Mexican Immigration Issues” by Victor Carmona

<http://kellogg.nd.edu/outreach/immigration.shtml>

An excellent compilation of resources including books, non-fiction reading resources, movies and other online teaching materials.

Indocumentales/Undocumentaries: the US/Mexico Interdependent Film Series

<http://indocumentales.com/>

An itinerant film and dialogue series on immigration and related issues. Indocumentales provides [educational resources](#) and an [interactive network](#) so that people have an opportunity to engage, come away more informed on the issues and have an impact. To host a screening and dialogue at your organization or in your city please contact us at info@indocumentales.com.

Latin American & Iberian Institute

<http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>

The Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI) receives resources from the U.S. Department of Education to support K-12 educators teaching about Latin America. Our goal is to provide a supportive environment for teachers across grade levels and subject areas so they can bring regional and linguistic knowledge of Latin America into their classrooms. As such as we provide curriculum materials, professional development workshops, and many more resources - nearly all of which are available on our website.

ABOUT
THIS GUIDE



Written by staff at the UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI), **Latin America Through Film Educator's Guides** provide an excellent way to teach about Latin America through film. For more materials that support teaching about Latin America in the classroom, visit the LAI online at <http://laii.unm.edu/outreach>. This guide was prepared 03/ 2012 by Katrina Dillon, LAI Project Assistant.